

***Draft National Child Policy by OPM, Division of Gender and Child Affairs, 2019.***

***“What we sow into the lives of our children as a nation today we will reap as a nation tomorrow. Sow good seeds so that when it is time to harvest, the harvest will be good. Sow good seeds so when our children grow up and write our history they will be good to us.”***

***The Hon. Minister Ayanna Webster- Roy  
Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister  
Division of Gender and Child Affairs.***

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GoRTT) renews its commitment to advancing children’s rights and ensuring their well-being. As such, this National Child Policy marks a critical milestone, **BEING THE FIRST NATIONAL POLICY FOR CHILDREN DEVELOPED IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**. The Policy is vital in providing long-term guidance and sets the framework to support suitable legislation, interventions and infrastructure that would further ensure the well-being of each child.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, (GoRTT’s) **VISION** is that:

***All children are happy, healthy and confident; and their rights are respected, protected and promoted to facilitate their holistic development towards achieving their fullest potential as constructive members of society now and in the future.***

Our **MISSION** is to work collectively to promote and ensure the positive development and well-being, best-interests and empowerment of all children.

This will be done through the **recognition of their importance, prioritisation of their needs, respect and protection of their rights, and encouragement of their active participation.**

This will be ensured through **strengthening of their family and community environments, and provision of quality, efficient and specialised support.**

The Policy is grounded in **EIGHT** guiding philosophies and sets out **FIVE** outcomes for children, i.e.

Children are

- i) ***Valued;***
- ii) ***Nurtured;***
- iii) ***Protected;***
- iv) ***Empowered;*** and
- v) ***Supported.***

The achievement of these outcomes is contingent on the attainment of **19 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES** and corresponding strategies linked to each outcome set out within the Policy. Given the multifaceted nature of children’s issues, it is essential for the Policy to be streamlined and complemented by auxiliary policies and strategies in various sectors requiring added attention such as health, education, social development, national security and justice.

While the policy focuses on achieving outcomes for all children equally, it acknowledges that some children require additional support, namely **TEENAGE MOTHERS AND FATHERS, CHILDREN WHO EXHIBIT HYPERSEXUAL BEHAVIOUR, VICTIMS OF SEXUAL AND OTHER ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CHILD OFFENDERS, CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPERVISION, HOMELESS AND ORPHANED CHILDREN, CHILDREN IN GANGS, CHILDREN WHO LIVE IN POVERTY/DISADVANTAGED SOCIO-ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES, CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES,** etc. As such, the Policy highlights **SIX key areas of concern** which require prioritisation, added investment and the development of specialised strategies/plans to support the realization of positive outcomes for these children. These are: -

- 1. Early Childhood Development;**
- 2. Social Protection;**
- 3. Health;**
- 4. Special Needs;**
- 5. Education; and**
- 6. Child Protection.**

All of the above in page 1 of these my first set of comments, are quoted directly from the **DRAFT NATIONAL CHILD POLICY**, the **FIRST** of its kind in our **56 year history** of self governance.

My warm and appreciative feelings go out to this government for putting this first National Child Policy up for discussion starting Wednesday the 22 day of May 2019 in South Trinidad, Monday the 10<sup>th</sup> day of June 2019 in Tobago, and Monday the 24<sup>th</sup> day of June 2019 in North Trinidad.

After living here for 71 years, Wednesday the 22 day of May is my 71<sup>st</sup> Birthday, having seen firsthand, what my mother and siblings had to go through when my father left home at our early ages and he and went through a Court system which allowed us to be put out of our childhood home, in order for him to get money to start another home in Sangre Grande, my welcome of the scope for child protection in this Policy is overwhelming.

How the government develops this protection for “CHILDREN IN CONTACT WITH THE LAW” will get my most urgent attention. The 2011 Child Population in Trinidad and Tobago, according to the CSO Central Statistical Office was 186,088 boys under age 17 and 162,310 girls under age 17. Everyone else, who is an adult today, has had to survive without a well planned and executed Child Policy. My 4 sisters and 1 brother migrated over 50 years ago and have established themselves well, as 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Citizens in Canada, mainly because of our backward recognition of the importance of keeping, nurturing and loving our natural born citizens here to help develop our Nation to their best of their ability. My 2 brothers, one deceased and I are have stayed here, working at it.

Needless to say, the opening words of the Minister Ayanna Webster-Roy, in the Policy document, is most appropriate for what we are seeing happening in our beloved Trinidad and Tobago today. What we have sowed and allowed to be sowed, over those years we are reaping today and have been reaping for many years since our Independence. I accept your apology, Madame Minister for the years your party had the power to do what was necessary and failed miserably.

My sadness for this 46 page document of over 50,000 words to have only mentioned the concept of **LOVE**, in 3 three instances, by the use of the word **LOVING** on pages 22 and 18, is an indication, in my humble view, that we are still falling short of our markers and academics and other policy makers, then to forget those God given gifts/accreditation of loving, given to them, before they put pen to paper, acknowledging that what man gives can be discredited, nothing God gives can so be by man, only God can take what God gives.

Add this to the fact that no mention was made of using that expensive Children’s Hospital to assist in the decrease of the alarming statistical data identified in the Policy and we see the selfish, greedy, partisan politics ,raising its head in an area where is has no place to be, loving children.

We have a lot of good things happening in critical areas, including the Early Childhood Care and Education Centres (ECCE), for those 3-4 year olds, but nothing for our 0 to 3 years old, the Infant to Toddler Annual Population. A programme patterned after our Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP), titled Infant to Toddler Partnership Programme (ITTPP), will be most a welcome addition to the list of strategies considered.

The opportunity has already been made available to us, by our Parliament in 1996, when the Counting Unremunerated Work Act was passed and assented to. To date, 24 years later, nothing has been done to validate, implement and give physical implementation to this historic effort by Dianna Mahabir-Whaytt and others. It only takes the introduction of a Care Allowance in our Personal Allowance System to allow for the early child care in the home and the payment for that comes from the taxpayer’s allowance.

The blatant neglect or refusal to get involved in those matters which they are most competent in, Architects and Planners, the development of the spaces we call home, known as Domestic Architecture, is a tragedy to say the least. If they can prove that they tried and were not given the opportunity to assist, let me apologize to them first.

A lot more will be said at the appropriate time in June and the attached YouTube video at the link <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oL4iUiH155k>, is a first interview to mention this National Child Policy.

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